

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 EUR-08 SP-02

CIAE-00 INR-05 EB-03 DODE-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-03

PRS-01 SAM-01 ARA-06 L-01 /061 W

----- 026911

R 160700Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1923

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

USINT BAGHDAD

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MUSCAT 0295

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MU

SUBJECT: OMAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PERSIAN GULF AND THE AMERICAN
PRESENCE

REF: STATE 052879, MANAMA 0181

SUMMARY. OMAN HAS BENEFITED IN RECENT YEARS MORE THAN ANY OTHER
GULF STATE FROM "REGIONAL" COOPERATION, THOUGH THIS HAS BEEN
RENDERED BILATERALLY BY AN ABLE FEW RATHER THAN UNDER A GULF
REGIONAL UMBRELLA. THIS ASSISTANCE, LARGELY MILITARY AND FINANCIAL,
HAS COME MAINLY FROM IRAN AND SAUDI ARBIA--SECONDARILY FROM UAE.
WE EXPECT OMANGOV WILL CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE CULTIVATION OF
BILATERAL LINKS WITH THESE SELECT FEW MEMBERS WF GULF COMMUNITY
RATHER THAN SEEK ITS FUTURE IN THE SORT OF MULTILATERAL
REGIONAL COOPERATION THAT MAY HOLD APPEAL FOR BAHRAIN AND SOME

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OTHER AREA COUNTRIES. IN OUR JUDGMENT OMAN SEES GROWING

USG AND PRIVATE AMERICAN ACTIVITY IN THE GULF AS A DISTINCTLY POSITIVE FACTOR FOR THE FUTURE. FROM SULTAN ON DOWN, OMANI POLICYMRRERS PROBABLY THINK THEIR OWN COUNTRY'S SECURITY AND THAT OF THE REGION WILL BE MUCH ENHANCED IF US FLEET, FOR EXAMPLE, SOMEHOW CONTINUES TO HOVER AROUND EVEN AFTER MIDEASTFOR SAILS AWAY. FOR WHEREAS IN THEORY THE OMANIS SEE REGIONAL COLLECTIVE DEFENSE AS AN OBJECTIVE, THEY DO NOT THINK IT ACHIEVABLE ANY TIME SOON. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE ARE CERTAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OMAN AND THE ARAB STATES OF THE PERSIAN GULF PROPER WHICH COLOR OMAN GOVERNMENT'S THINKING ABOUT GULF AFFAIRS INCLUDING SECURITY ASPECTS. FIRST, OMAN BY VIRTUE OF GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY IS MORE A COUNTRY OF SOUTH ARABIA THAN A PROTOTYPE GULF STATE. IT LOOKS SOUTHEAST TO PAKISTAN AND INDIA, AND NEVERVUSLY SOUTHWEST TO ADEN AND THE HORN OF AFRICA, WHEN FORMING ITS POLICIES AS WELL AS TO THE GULF COMMUNITY. SECOND, THE OMANGOV KNOWS FROM ITS HARD DHOFAR EXPERIENCE THE GUT VALUE OF DEPENDABLE, WELL-TO-DO ALLIES WITH BOTH THE CAPABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO PITCH IN AND HELP. THIS EXPERIENCE MAKES OMAN IMPATIENT WITH PLATITUDES AND SERMONIZING FROM BROTHER ARAB STATES, INCLUDING SOME IN THE GULF, ABOUT THE DANGERS OF "OCCUPATION" BY EXPATRIATE "IMPERIALISTS" AND ARMIES. THIRD, THE COUNTRY HAS NO PALESTINIAN MINORITY PROBLEM. IT REALIZES THIS GIVES IT A LONG-TERM LEG UP SECURITY-WISE AND IN TERMS OF POLITICAL PRESSURES, AND IT AIMS TO KEEP THINGS THIS WAY.

2. SEEN IN THIS CONTEXT, THE OMANGOV TENDENCY TO PICK AND CHOOSE SELECTIVELY WHEN IT CONSIDERS ITS INTERACTION WITH STATES OF THE GULF CAN BE BETTER APPRECIATED. OMAN SEES LITTLE TO GAIN FROM COZYING UP TO KUWAIT, BAHRAIN, IRAQ OR QATER (THOUGH THE LATTER IN A WAY IS A SPECIAL CASE BECAUSE OF ITS PARTICULARLY CLOSE LINKS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND MUSCAT'S REALIZATION THAT THE QATARIS MAY AT SOME STAGE BE A GOOD FRIEND TO HAVE IN COURT IN RIYADH). THE SULTAN AND THOSE WHO SURROUND HIM LOOK ASKANCE AT PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIMENTATION IN KUWAIT AND BAHRAIN, TENDING TO EQUATE
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SUCH MANNER OF DEMOCRATIC TENDENCIES WITH RADICALISM IF NOT DOWNRIGHT SUBVERSION. AS TO IRAQ, IT WILL TAKE MUCH TIME FOR OMAN'S SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE BEATHISTS' REAL INTENTIONS IN THE GULF TO WEAR AWAY; LOCAL SECURITY TYPES ARE STAYING AWAKE NIGHTS IN MUSCAT DEVISING FOOL-PROOF METHODS FOR EAVESDROPPING ON WHATEVER IRAQI AMBASSADOR SOON TURNS UP HERE.

3. YET OMAN RECOGNIZES THE VITAL NATURE OF ITS PRESENT AND FORESEEABLE TIES WITH THE BIG TWO OF THE GULF, SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN. RATHER LESS CONSISTENTLY, IT SEEMS TO SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD LINKS WITH THE NEIGHBORING UAE. PROPER UNDERSTANDING WITH THE SAUDIS IS VIEWED IN MUSCAT AS PARTICULARLY ESSENTIAL, BOTH FOR GENERAL PLITICAL SUPPORT IN ARAB COUNCILS AND FOR AN INEXHAUSTIBLE SOURCE OF CASH WHEN NEEDED OVER THE YEARS. AS TO IRAN, OMANI POLICYMAKERS TAKE SERIOUSLY THEIR JOINT RESPONSIBILITY WITH THE IRANIANS AS "GUARDIANS" OF THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ ALTHOUGH STRICTLY IN POWER TERMS OMAN OF COURSE IS INCAPABLE OF MAKING ITS WORD STICK AS A PROPER GUARDIAN SHOULD. OMANGOV IS GENUINELY GRATEFUL FOR THE FAIRLY EFFECTIVE MILITARY AID RENDERED IN DHOFAR BY THE SHAH, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE WHILE EXTENDING IT HE MADE SURE THAT IRAN AND IRANIANS MAINTAINED AN ALMOST INVISIBLE PROFILE IN NORTHERN OMAN AND EVEN IN THE IMMEDIATE SALALAH DISTRICT. BY EARNING THESE HIGH MARKS FROM THE SULTAN, THE SHAH PROBABLY HAS ASSURED THAT OMAN WILL WANT TO KEEP UP A GOOD AND FAIRLY ACTIVE RELATIONSHIP, ONE THAT IN TIME MAY PRODUCE BILATERAL MILITARY AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE MUSANDAM/STRAITS OF HORMUZ REGION.

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ARA-06 PM-03 DODE-00 CIAE-00 SP-02 IO-03 EB-03 L-01

OMB-01 PRS-01 TRSE-00 SAM-01 /061 W

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4. WHEN IT COMES TO PRACTICAL MULTILATERAL STEPS TO INCREASE COOPERATION AMONG GULF STATES, SAY IN THE MONETARY, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION OR CULTURAL FIELDS, OMAN SO FAR HAS BEEN VERY MUCH A FOLLOWER. WE THINK IT INTENDS TO CONTINUE THIS POSTURE, AND NOT TOOYEAH. IT WILL REMAIN COOL TO KUWAIT'S LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES IN THE GULF. OMAN SEES SAUDI ARABIA AS THE ONLY LEGITIMATE LEADER TOWARD GREATER ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THIS REGION, ALTHOUGH IT WISHES THE SAUDIS SOMEHOW WOULD SHED THEIR HABITUAL FOOT-DRAGGING TENDENCY AND REALLY APPLY THEMSELVES TO THE TASK. ONE OF OMAN'S RECENT, VERY OUT-OF-CHARACTER INITIATIVES IN THE GULF WAS DESPATCH OF A TRAVELING MISSION TO TALK ABOUT LAW OF THE SEA MATTERS PRIOR TO CURRENT LOS CONFERENCE. BUT THIS SUBJECT (AND WITHIN IT THE ISSUE OF PASSAGE THROUGH STRAITS) IS ONE IN WHICH THE OMANGOV CONSISTENTLY HAS SHOWN MORE THAN ORDINARY INTEREST.

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5. OMAN HAS NO PROBLEM WITH PRESENT U.S. ACTIVITY IN THE GULF. IT IS UNEASY ABOUT SOVIET INFLUENCE IN IRAQ AND EVEN MORE SO ABOUT SOVIET/CUBAN PRESENCE IN PDRY AND THE NORTHWEST INDIAN OCEAN AREA. IT WOULD BE PLEASED TO SEE MIDEASTFOR REMAIN, THOUGH KNOWING THAT ITS DAYS PROBABLY ARE NUMBERED AND THAT IT ISN'T THAT STRONG A FORCE ANYHOW. OMAN CERTAINLY WILL QUIETLY CONTINUE TO FAVOR ROUTINE US NAVAL OPERATIONS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND GULF AND TO WELCOME OCCASIONAL USN VISITS TO MUSCAT AS WELL AS LOW-LEVEL, RUDIMENTARY NAVAL COOPERATION WHEN SUCH USN UNITS ARE NEAR OMANI WATERS. WE JUDGE THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND INFORMED OMANIS GENERALLY ARE HAPPY ABOUT THE EVER-GREATER AMERICAN PARTICIPATION AND INTEREST IN THE GULF AND PENINSULA IN TERMS OF COMMERCE, INVESTMENT AND EDUCATION. THEY WANT TO DILUTE THEIR OWN TRADITIONAL DEPENDENCE ON THE BRITISH, AND THEY SENSE THAT OUR PARTICULAR CREDENTIALS IN TERMS OF POWER, TECHNOLOGY AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE MAKE US THE BEST SINGLE ALTERNATIVE TO THIS TRADITIONAL DEPENDENCE ON LONDON. IT MAY BE TRUE TO SAY THAT THEY WANT US MORE THAN WE WANT THEM, WHICH MAY SOMEDAY BECOME A PROBLEM IN ITSELF THOUGH IT HASN'T YET.

6. NONE OF THIS IS MEANT TO IMPLY THAT OMAN SEES GREATER US PRESENCE OR PROGRAMS AS A PANACEA FOR IT OR THE REGION. THOUGH AS GOOD HOSTS IN THE ARAB TRADITION THEY DO NOT

BUG US ABOUT THESE THINGS, THE OMANIS ARE ALREADY EXPERIENCED MINOR FRUSTRATIONS IN SOME ASPECTS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP AND MAY CONSIDER THAT WE HAVE FALLEN DOWN OR LEFT THEM HANGING A BIT TOO OFTEN. (COMING TO MIND ARE SUCH ITEMS AS DELAYS IN CERTAIN ARMS SALES LAST SUMMER AND FALL, OUR INABILITY AT TIMES TO COME UP RAPIDLY ENOUGH WITH CANDIDATES FOR TECHNICAL ADVISORY SLOTS, AND OUR INACTION ON THE WHOLE QUESTION OF ACCESS TO MASIRAH SINCE JANUARY 1975.) THE NEED WE PERCEIVE HERE, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IN ORDER TO KEEP THE POSITIVE TREND OF US-OMANI RELATIONS ABUILDING IS THE SAME AS EXPRESSED SO WELL IN MANAMA'S 0181: IMPROVING THE USG CAPABILITY TO RESPOND PROMPTLY AND FLEXIBLY TO LITTLE NEEDS. WE THINK THAT, BY AND LARGE, OMAN'S REQUESTS OF US WILL CONTINUE TO BE VERY MODEST AND THAT THEY WILL REMAIN WILLING TO PAY FOR WHAT THEY REALLY NEED. WE SHOULD
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EXERT EFFORT TO BE RAPIDLY RESPONSIVE TO SENSIBLE REQUESTS.

7. AS A COMMENT ON ONE OF MANAMA'S PARTICULAR POINTS (ALSO IN PARA 9 OF ITS 0181) WE QUESTION UTILITY OF USING IN OMAN, EVEN IF THE HOST-COUNTRY REIMBURSABLE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONCEPT CATCHES ON HERE, EXPERTS FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES SUCH AS SAUDI ARABIA ON SPIN-OFF TDY VISITS. THE OMANIS, OUT OF PRIDE IN THEIR OWN EXTENSIVE COUNTRY AND THE REALIZATION THAT THEY HAVE MUCH TO DO TO CATCH UP WITH MOST OF THEIR NEIGHBORS, WILL FEEL ENTITLED TO FULL-TIME EXPERTS RATHER THAN TWO WEEK OR TWO MONTH WONDERS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION, FOREIGN ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MUSCAT00295
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760098-0600
From: MUSCAT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760357/aaaabxof.tel
Line Count: 256
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 52879, 76 MANAMA 181
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2004 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <08 SEP 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OMAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PERSIAN GULF AND THE AMERICAN PRESENCE
TAGS: PFOR, MU, US, SA, IR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006